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COVER SHEET

RENEGOTIATING THE NOTION OF ARTISTIC GENIUS - within the frame of an institutional theatre

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Video from rehearsals: Catrine Zorn and Mette Tranholm

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Abstract:

This exposition explores how the Betty Nansen Theatre in Copenhagen, with the artistic research project, BETTY DEVELOPS, works with spreading a collaborative practice to the infrastructure of an entire institutional theatre and how this renegotiates the notion of artistic genius and the star. The exposition offers a meta-reflection on the author's artistic research activities at the theatre. These reflections shed light on what happens when collaborative methods of working and producing are implemented in an institutional theatre and discuss the extent to which artistic research can develop methods for collaborative co-creation as well as resistance to the neoliberal individualised performance culture. Could such methods prevent you from falling back on a modernist understanding of the artist as the original creator of an individual expression and instead support a collaborative art and knowledge practice? As opposed to defining artistic creation as something that springs from and comes from an individual (the artistic genius or star), the author argues that artistic creation is a relational act, and that art is something that comes to be between people.

This exposition is a collage of empirical material, text, images, and video gathered and produced over the last five years while facilitating, documenting, researching, and sharing the development of fourteen BETTY DEVELOPS productions.

Keywords:

collaborative performance-making, genius, star, performing arts, institutional theatre, making-with, collaborative research, production conditions

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Page description: The page is underlaid with a mesh of interwoven coloured lines, resembling paths that traverse the exposition connecting yellow pink and green circles. Distributed throughout these circles and in between them are images and videos depicting the actors engaged in workshop-rehearsals. Some of the circles contain playful rearrangements of key terms from the text such as 'genius', 'auteur' and 'collaboration'.

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In 2020, I was hired as a researcher and the manager of the Betty Nansen Theatre's artistic research project, BETTY DEVELOPS, which was initiated in 2019 by the current management. The Betty Nansen Theatre is a government-funded institutional theatre located in Copenhagen. This exposition offers a meta-reflection on my artistic research activities at the theatre. These reflections shed light on what happens when a collaborative artistic practice is spread to an institutional context and infrastructure. Thus far, in my artistic research, I have unpacked the following: What happens when collaborative methods of working and producing are implemented in an institutional theatre? What does it mean for the notion of artistic genius and the star? To what extent can a collaborative approach in an institutional theatre offer itself as a figure of resistance to the neoliberal individualised performance culture? To what extent can artistic research develop methods for collaborative co-creation? Could such methods prevent you from falling back on a modernist understanding of the artist as the original creator of an individual expression and instead support a collaborative art and knowledge practice? The overarching goal with our artistic research project is to redefine how we understand artistic creation not as something that springs from and comes from an individual (the artistic genius or star). Instead, I argue that artistic creation is a relational act, and that art is something that comes to be between people.

Paradigm shift in culture, values, and production conditions

In a Danish context, the art-institutional landscape has been under pressure for the past two

decades from cultural politics and a battle of values sparked in 2001 by the right-wing Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen, resulting in budget cuts, decentralisation, neoliberalist streamlining, and effectivity. In 2016, Prime Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen's right-wing government established a two per cent annual budgetary saving on government funding to many workplaces in the public sector, including the cultural sector, thus impacting museums, theatres, and art education. The advent of neoliberalism in government-funded performing arts institutions instigated institutional changes, such as the spread of quantitative performance management instruments, which control and internalise key performance indicators (such as number of audiences and performances) in performing arts institutions, including the Betty Nansen Theatre. Consequently, the institutional economy depends on hyper productivity and a need for massive earnings in tickets sold or private funding. These changes do not leave much room for the institutions to develop and experiment. As a result, theatres tend to pick the safe bets in terms of repertoire and casting. BETTY DEVELOPS is a reaction and resistance to this national institutional landscape. At the same time, patriarchal performing arts institutions and the notion of artistic genius are falling apart. We are amid a paradigm shift, including in the way we produce art. Several voices (Campenhout and Mestre 2016, Petrovich and White 2018, Lindelof and Janssen 2023) in the national and international field of performing arts spell out challenges and pain points: the institutions are old, patriarchal, and antiquated, made for a different time in terms of imperialism, ethnicity, location, gender, age, etc. We need alternative models from which to produce performing arts. There is pain in the infrastructure.

A continuous practice is challenged by precarious fixed-term project work, and there has been a cutback in ensembles at the Danish institutional theatres. In her seminal work *Artist at Work: Proximity of Art and Capitalism* (2015), Slovenian performance theoretic Bojana Kunst has described well the flexible, precarious, underpaid but passionate art worker, and called upon the art world to look closely at its own production conditions. We need to rethink the conditions of production, focusing on bringing care to the infrastructure and the many bodies supporting the artist at work (Kunst 2015). This means focusing not only on the artwork itself and its political potential but also on the conditions of production. Following philosopher Walter Benjamin, Kunst points out that the art world needs to look closely at its own production conditions to be political.

The attention paid to the artwork over the production conditions is linked to a widespread and, historically speaking, hierarchical and patriarchal model organised around the artistic genius. In her book *Produktionsæstetik* (2022), performance scholar Cecilie Ullerup Schmidt describes how the notion of the artistic genius springs from Immanuel Kant's *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (1793), where he separates the artist from his surroundings. Kant describes talent as an inborn gift and therefore independent from the artist's surroundings/others. Kant thus isolates and lifts the artist (Schmidt 2022). Schmidt notes that, as a result, the entire infrastructure that carries the artist becomes invisible and is ascribed less value, creatively as well as economic value, that is: 'the care work, the coordinating work, the maintaining and supporting work, the work of the frames, the work of invisible borders, the work of feelings, the work of relationships, the delegated work, the work of parents, of grandparents, of foremothers, the work of the planet' (Schmidt 2023: 2).

The patriarchal model has been shaken in recent years. In a Danish context, collective movements within experimental independent theatre groups and performance collectives such as LOGEN, *DANSEatelier*, We Like We, The Other Eye of the Tiger, Skrivekollektivet, FAMILIEN, Persona non Grata, and BMS have blossomed as alternatives to traditional hierarchies of power and binary oppositions between for example, director and actor, and management models where the artistic leader/genius of groups, as well as performing art institutions, sits on top of the pyramid, deciding everything. Collective movements challenge a Western art history dominated by the myth of the white, male, artistic genius. The collectives of the independent scene flourish but are at the same time marked by precarious freelance working conditions (Daugaard and others 2020). The Betty Nansen Theatre is not an independent theatre group, but an institutional theatre working with many different artistic partners. However, we have developed a hybrid production format in which elements from independent theatre groups and performance collectives, such as prolonged workshop-based rehearsals and collaborative methods of working, are implemented into the traditionally hierarchically constructed institutional theatre. We use workshop-rehearsals consequently. All of our productions are included in the hybrid production format. Nevertheless, an elaborate methodology for collaborative co-creation has so far been lacking in the Danish performing arts field.

BETTY DEVELOPS - an artistic research experiment

In 2018 the managing duo Eva Præstiin, producer, and Elisa Kragerup, director, took over the reins of the Betty Nansen Theatre. The duo met at the Royal Danish Theatre where they were a part of the Red Room (2010–16), an experimental satellite ensemble, a unique pocket in the larger institution instigated by artistic director Emmet Feigenberg. The ensemble was composed of six actors, two directors, one light designer, one scenographer, and one producer. They were ‘set free’ to pursue a feminist and collaborative practice and politics of care in the sense that they could work outside the Royal Danish Theatre’s strict deadlines and demands for productivity and tickets sold. The practice was collaborative, process-led, improvisational, and interdisciplinary. The Red Room made it possible to work collaboratively and without the constraints of the bigger institutional theatre. In a series of (unpublished) interviews I conducted with Kragerup and Præstiin respectively, they both voiced that the only regret they felt when leaving the Red Room was that they did not document their work and findings. What they learned was not absorbed by the institution itself nor passed on to others. The knowledge was lost.

When the Red Room closed, the duo asked: How and *where* can we continue our collaborative practice? Can we bring permanent change to an institution? Would it be possible to transfer and spread the collaborative practice to the infrastructure of an institutional theatre? What would it look like in that setting? The duo set out to start this experiment at the Betty Nansen Theatre. Kragerup is publicly cast as an individual star or auteur; however, collaborative work processes and methods have been deeply imbedded in her practice since she became a founding member of the performance collective Sort Samvittighed seventeen years ago. The duo knew that the collaborative practice requires extra time so their first order of business was to apply for funding from the Bikuben Foundation to investigate the following artistic research questions with the project BETTY DEVELOPS: Can the collaborative practice

be transferred and spread to an entire institutional infrastructure? How can more artistic disciplines and scenic functions build competencies in the collaborative practice? How can we document, evaluate, and share knowledge about the collaborative practice? How can we create innovative artworks, and rethink and reorganise the way we produce institutionalised theatre while documenting and sharing the process? All of these questions were addressed to me as a researcher when I was hired. After five years, this is still very much a work-in-process.

Artistic research as an institutional function

BETTY DEVELOPS under my facilitation experimented with spreading the artists' self-reflection in relation to the process to collaborative artistic research as an institutional function. When Kragerup and Præstiin started at the Betty Nansen Theatre, a central part of BETTY DEVELOPS was (inspired by the artistic research field, e.g. Hannula, Vadén, and Suoranta's (2014) *Artistic Research Methodology: Narrative, Power, and the Public*) to strengthen their collaborative practice and create a language for it by documenting and writing about it as well as formulating research questions around a narrative of collaboration to share with the rest of the theatre, other artists, and the public. As the project manager of BETTY DEVELOPS, I have developed methods for the collaborative practice and made them available to others. I have focused on the collaborative practice as an act of knowledge production and contributed to the development of a common foundation of knowledge about collaboration within the frame of the institutional theatre. The ambition is for BETTY DEVELOPS to become a hub for knowledge creation and production with collaboration as the keyword and to share this knowledge with peers and the public.

The central task of an institutional theatre is to make artworks. However, through BETTY DEVELOPS, an extra institutional task was introduced in the form of collaborative artistic research: To reflect on the art-making process while making it through feedback, evaluations, and method development. In my artistic research, I have had two intertwining functions, tasks or 'acts that are part of the practice' (Hannula, Vadén, and Suoranta 2014: 4). First, I have coordinated, designed, facilitated and documented seventy workshop-rehearsals. These acts hold artistic value that helped 'make and shape the practice' (Hannula, Vadén, and Suoranta 2014: 4). Second, I have helped to facilitate forums where members of the permanent staff reserved time for common reflection, learning, and evaluation. I have collaborated closely with freelancers and the permanent staff in both of my functions. The first track is the basis for the second, but they have informed and expanded each other as well as helped develop methods for collaborative co-creation and created a language for the practice. I have helped transform the invisible and intuitive knowledge into methods, tools and a vocabulary for the collaborative practice. As an example, I am the author of the guide 'Eight Paths for Collaborative Co-Creation' (depicted below, on the left), but the guide — and all the other material I have produced — is developed emergently and is a result of collaborative research and many different people's statements, experiences, and inputs.

My approach is qualitative research through process and workshop-rehearsal observations as well as interviews with the permanent staff and freelancers. I have planned and organised the prolonged rehearsal processes that include recurring workshops, and I have documented them in writing, pictures, and video. I have gathered all the material in a shared file bank that

everyone can access. The video material was used to recall and recreate improvisations. The knowledge I gained from experiencing and documenting workshop-rehearsals feed into designing and facilitating the process as well as describing and reflecting on the process in order to form a language. The knowledge I have gathered grows as it is activated in new designs and conversations with others. BETTY DEVELOPS and my presence at the theatre have provided a rare opportunity for an institutional theatre to produce and share knowledge coming directly from the artistic practice. In this sense, we have made artistic research an institutional function that involves artistic practice directly.

The desire to work with a collaborative practice sprung from Kragerup and Præstiin, but they were searching for methods. The first thing I did was to interview them about their practice and their reflections in these unpublished interviews inform parts of this exposition. Simultaneously, I experienced them at work 'on the floor' as the management duo and separately as the producer and director. From this, I was able to extract and formulate the essential elements of the practice, such as path #1 *co-creation in all phases*. Then, we started working on spreading this practice to other artists and conceptualising groups, especially younger artists who wished to work more collaboratively. We were able to offer them the time, resources and framework to work in a different way. We have supported the younger artists in how to best use a workshop and helped them design an infrastructure for collaboration. The next step in the dissemination was to bring international artist on board. Some had never worked with workshops the way we do and, therefore, for them, it was a gift to cast and meet the actors very early on.

Simultaneously, I have also worked on spreading the collaborative practice to the surrounding world. I started with others in the Danish cultural landscape through talks at The National Danish School for Performing Arts, for example. During 2020 and 2021, we conducted six BETTY MEETS events: four live events and two podcasts where representatives from the Betty Nansen Theatre had moderated talks with other voices from inside and outside the arts that were interested in collaboration. We did this to share our research and to widen the scope of our knowledge. In 2023, three years into our research project, we wished to further expand our horizon through knowledge exchange. Therefore, I organised the symposium 'Reenact the Performing Art Institutions' at the theatre, with international keynote speakers from academia and performance collectives. This contributed to the creation of a cross-institutional and cross-national language. At the symposium, we discussed the possible futures for the performing art institutions and how we can create more sustainable, collaborative, caring, and joyful production conditions. After the symposium, we made and shared an Inspiration Catalogue (Tranholm 2023a): a mash-up from the four keynote speakers and the central findings from the discussion groups.

Image description: A graphic element introduces 8 PATHS TO COLLABORATIVE CO-CREATION. The text reads:

1. CO-CREATION IN ALL PHASES

All performing arts is a product of co-creation. The radical approach to collaboration at the Betty Nansen Theater lies in the fact that this collaborative vision and co-creation is present throughout all phases - from repertoire planning to idea generation, concept development,

text development, production design to performance.

2. EQUALITY? NO THANKS

To enable collaborative co-creation, it is important to clarify from the beginning which approach to collaboration is being embraced. Our approach to collectivity is not about everyone being equal, but about co-creation between a community of strong and often opposing individuals. The director is a leader and facilitator, but there is a high degree of co-creation and exchange between competencies and production functions. People are always welcome to disagree with the facilitator, but it is important to lay out in advance who has the artistic leadership and decision-making competence.

3. THE MAGIC HAPPENS ON THE FLOOR

A powerful method of generating material collaboratively is improvisation. The facilitator delegates and assigns tasks to the performers. The ideas of the performers are translated concretely and physically on the floor - instead of sitting at a desk and devising them. In this way, the performers gain ownership of the material, and several actors contribute to creating and playing the same character.

4. TIME TO TEST GENERATES COURAGE

We believe that more time is key to generating courage to test brave ideas, and that this flourishes in an artistic process, where as many people as possible engage in dialogue with each other and with the material. The process leads to an artistic work that is unique and told in a new, previously unknown, scenic language. In workshops we test ideas for physicality and scenographic resonance early on in the process. The actors are closely involved in this process, as they will ultimately be on the ones on stage.

5. CLEAR FRAMEWORKS

Generating material collaboratively requires a clear framework. A core revelation for us is that workshops must be prepared thoroughly, and that there must be a good process design, a clear framework and goal that the various competencies can speak to. It is also essential to align expectations, evaluate and ensure clear role distribution. Workshop courses are tailored to the needs of the individual performance and the process design is continuously reevaluated.

6. UNFINISHED SKETCHES? YES PLEASE

All material is shared including weird half-finished sketches and improvisations. It is crucial that people make themselves and their material available during process. The path to the sublime goes through many bad iterations, suggestions and ideas. But joint interdisciplinary and cross-aesthetic idea generation takes the pressure off the individual, and a range of people are involved in influencing, interpreting and adapting the material. Everything from filmed improvisations to mood boards is collected in a common material and sketch collection, which everyone has access to. In this way, a common language is slowly built for the production's universe.

7. SAFE SPACES TO BE BRAVE

We want to create innovative works of high artistic quality, but it is equally as important to us that the works are produced both ethically and sustainably. When we ask for risk-taking,

courage and misfires, it is important that we ourselves show the same willingness to take risks, both as people and as an institution. We take responsibility for all productions and try to create mutual trust between the actors by creating a safe environment. Care is therefore a core management principle, with a focus on proper working conditions and a healthy work culture, especially for freelance employees.

8. SHARE WITH THE WORLD

Our ambition is to bring knowledge, documentation, and artistic research into performing arts. And convey our insights to the outside world. For an institution, reflection, dissemination, and awareness of one's own practice creates a community of practice internally, while simultaneously forming an external voice. We believe that if performing arts as a field is to have a voice both culturally and politically, then we need a language that can express our art form and its importance for society.

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Exposition outline

A few months into my artistic research at the theatre, I noticed how the collaborative practice, when transferred to the institutional framework, began to push and shake hierarchies and the notion of artistic genius and the star. Therefore, the goal of our artistic research project is to discuss the following questions: How does a collaborative approach, and more time via stretched-out rehearsals, affect ideas about power, traditional hierarchies, production conditions, and the notion of artistic genius and the star at an institutional theatre? What are the ideological, democratic, and ethical implications? What does an artistic research approach and my work as artistic researcher do to the machinery of the institutional theatre? To what extent can artistic research develop methods for collaborative co-creation? In the first part of the exposition, I analyse and reflect on how the hybrid production format, workshop design, co-facilitation, disidentification, and cross-disciplinary collaboration renegotiated the notion of artistic genius. In the second part, I move deeper into the aesthetic realm to discuss how workshop-rehearsals, improvisation, and shared invention renegotiated notions of artistic genius and the star.

To narrow the scope of this exposition, I focus on the two productions *Animal Farm* (2022) and *Dark Spring* (2022). *Animal Farm* was based on George Orwell's novel from 1945 about animals on a farm starting a revolution to break free from the power of their owner only to find themselves, when liberated, recreating the same abuse of power. The performance featured nine female performers on stage: Ena Spottag, Siff Vintersol, Tina Gylling Mortensen, Sarah Boberg, Maria Winther Nørgaard, Maria Rich, Xenia Noetzelman, Marie Dalsgaard, and musician/composer Jenny 'Lydmor' Rossander. The conceptualising team comprised play writer Tom Silkeberg, composer Jenny 'Lydmor' Rossander, scenographer Ida Grarup, and director Elisa Kragerup. *Dark Spring* is based on the 1969 novel by German surrealist writer Unica Zürn. The story takes place in mid-war Berlin where we follow the thought and fantasy world of an unnamed girl from her birth until she commits suicide at the age of twelve. The two actors Mathilde Arcel Fock and Peter Christoffersen, and the two dancers Lukas Hartvig-

Møller and Maria Bernholdt, did the performance when it was developed in 2020, but it was postponed owing to COVID-19. When it finally premiered in 2022, dancers Hartvig-Møller and Bernholdt were replaced by Alma Toaspern and Marcus Alexander Roydes owing to schedule conflicts. The conceptualising team was director Amanda Linnea Ginman, co-director and choreographer Sebastian Kloborg, play writer Sonja Ferdinand, musician/composer Jenny 'Lydmor' Rossander, and scenography consultant and costume designer Karin Gille. As a backdrop for my analysis and discussion, I now present a short overview of the theoretical perspectives and the notion of the star.

Theoretical perspectives

I have used theoretical concepts from my academic research in theatre and performance theory (Tranholm 2017) in the collaborative practice at the theatre as one method to form a language for the practice. Among others, I have used work by philosopher and feminist Donna J. Haraway to create a vocabulary that collaboratively reimagines binary oppositions, such as materialism/idealism, body/mind, nature/culture, and animal/human, in new affirmative ways that encourage us to understand ideas and concepts more collectively. In her essay 'A Manifesto for Cyborgs' (1985) Haraway uses the hybrid cyborg to present a critique of Western logocentric binary thinking that separates nature/culture, human/animal, human/machine, etc. For Haraway, they are interrelated and as such we cannot separate ourselves from our surroundings. In *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (2016), Haraway takes her philosophy further into our world on the brink of environmental destruction. She argues that the Anthropocene mindset views the current time as the time of humans, which means that several other species and earthly organisms, which also effect and are affected by climate change, are overlooked. Haraway suggests that humans should stay with the trouble of the current changes as something we must address together. Haraway highlights that no species is autopoietic (self-making) but sympoietic (making-with/becoming-with each other). All creatures are mutually dependent and there is a kinship between all species. Haraway urges staying with the trouble of our world by responding, not as individuals or through self-making, but by coming together and *making-with* each other 'in unexpected collaborations and combinations, in hot compost piles' (Haraway 2016: 4). When you experiment with something new, such as implementing a new production format, it causes trouble in navigation. I brought Haraway's theories into the practice at the theatre by encouraging colleagues to stay with the trouble of the *making-with* of the collaborative practice. This notion seemed to immediately resonate with many at the theatre and the phrase stuck to our common vocabulary. In this way theories were used in the practice.

The Kantian notion of the artistic genius gives the impression that the artwork is made by one person. There is an implicit critique of Immanuel Kant in Haraway's theories since Kant makes a separation between the artist and his surroundings so that the artist exists as a separate entity with a higher value attributable to an inborn talent. According to Haraway, there is no self-making, no separate entities, as we cannot separate ourselves from our surroundings. As such, the separation that Kant makes between the artist and his surroundings is not final or fixed and can be enacted differently and changed again and again, which is important to keep in mind because it is related to power structures, responsibility, and ethics in terms of who is included and excluded. Following Kunst, Schmidt, and Haraway, the infrastructure around the

artist holds as much value as the artist and we cannot separate the two. I see Haraway's theories play out on a practical level at the Betty Nansen Theatre, including in my own work, since we have explored making not binary but multi-collaborative patterns and exchanges with each other, bringing forward new solutions, combinations, and ways of producing theatre. As a result of this, the artistic genius has started to dissolve. When the notion of the isolated artistic genius dissolves, the idea of the artwork as the product of one person's effort cracks and paves the way for an expanded understanding of what the work of art is. This expansion brings forward the infrastructure and people behind the artwork that makes it possible — and the fact that the artwork and the infrastructure around the artwork are intrinsically connected. I argue that extending a collaborative practice to the infrastructure of the theatre spreads the notion of the artistic genius to many bodies, supports a more sustainable infrastructure that values all functions, and brings people together instead of separating them.

Subverting the superstar

Historically, ensemble theatre has presented an alternative to the commercial star theatre. The word 'star' was imported from the astronomical lexicon and in 1824 it was used 'to describe an actress who, by name alone, could pack a theatre' (Roberts 2010: 108). As such, star theatre is linked to commercial and capitalist interests. The rising film industry quickly picked up the use of the star for commercial purposes, and in 1922 the Hollywood star system was fully established (Thomsen 1997). Commercial star theatre, and the Hollywood star system and its production of one-dimensional stars serving a capitalist, patriarchal agenda, provoked several counter-reactions within more critical and progressive forces. As an example, from the 1930s avant-garde, in opposition to the Hollywood star system as well as fascism, Konstantin Stanislavski and Bertolt Brecht, although they have both been cast as major individual geniuses, in fact favoured the theatrical ensemble and collaborative work processes over the production of singular stars, easily digestible entertainment, and profit, even as they developed significantly different aesthetic solutions to the political challenges of their time. During the 1970s, a wave of neo-avantgarde group theatre was acted out on a new scale; for example, with the Danish group Solvognen. Group theatre and performance collectives renegotiated and subverted the concept of the star: *the group is the star*. Artists such as Jack Smith and Andy Warhol also developed artistic practices characterised by a subversive use of the superstar. Smith and Warhol worked *on and against* the superstar concept, transforming it from within by photographing *not* professional actors and models, but eccentric bohemians from the underground scenes, drag queens, hustlers, artists, and poor immigrants, calling them superstars.

The term "superstar" as well as the very idea of Warhol's Factory – an avant-garde, Bohemian simulacrum of the traditional Hollywood studio, consisting of an ensemble of essentially replaceable stars and starlets presided over by a charismatic auteur – were appropriated by Warhol from Smith's Cinemaroc. (Rinder 1997:144)

In the performance collectives emerging around the 1990s, such as She She Pop, Rimini Protokoll, Need Company, and Gob Squad, the subversive use of the superstar is recircled in reality theatre genres where, for example, Rimini Protokoll positions the so-called *everyday*

experts (non-professionals) as stars, Gob Squad casts audience members as stars, and Need Company insists that all the members of the group carry a 'shared intellectual responsibility' (Stalpaert 2009: 121–22). In other words, the group is the star. We have been testing whether it is possible to bring *the group is the star* concept into the institutional theatre.

Institutional theatres and independent theatre groups

Historically as well as today, institutional theatres and independent theatre groups are in many ways two binary oppositional domains. Institutional theatres are linked to the production logic of bourgeoisie theatre, commercial star theatre, and the concept of an artistic genius producing art in structural and social isolation (Schmidt 2021, 2022). Contrary to this, the independent theatre groups and theatrical collectives have aimed to work collaboratively and dissolve hierarchical organisational structures and to perform figures of resistance under precarious and authoritarian conditions. The Betty Nansen Theatre is not an independent theatre group; however, we stand out since we have devoted ourselves to experimenting with spreading a collaborative practice to the productional infrastructure of an institutional theatre. The question is whether the mix of the two domains institutionalises and capitalises the collaborative practice, turning it into the very thing it was meant to disrupt, or whether it creates new possibilities and helps us all to consider and question binary oppositions and the consequential power structures. This exposition argues the latter.

PART ONE

A hybrid production format

A central finding from my artistic research, including my practical experience with facilitating workshop-rehearsals, is that a key to spreading the collaborative practice to the institutional theatre is the hybrid production format. The format makes it possible for everyone to start together. What changes to the infrastructure are necessary for this to happen? Extra time. At an institutional theatre, a performance will usually have a rehearsal period of six to seven weeks, culminating in a premiere. Before rehearsals start, the director, scenographer, and perhaps a playwright (the creating artists) have decided concept, space, thematic focus, and scenic language. During rehearsals, the performing artists, i.e. the actors and dancers, realise the concept. With this model, the director, as the artistic genius, is the leader at the top of the hierarchy.

We renegotiate this production format. With financial support from the Bikuben Foundation, we can provide extra time to develop the performances through workshop-based prolonged rehearsals prior to rehearsal start, oftentimes a year or two before the premiere. The Bikuben Foundation is an independent foundation that supports the development of innovative and experimental ideas, structures, and methods within current performing and visual arts.

All performing arts is a result of collaboration. What makes the collaborative practice at the Betty Nansen Theatre radical is that we practice collaborative co-creation in all phases of a production both artistically and organisationally in the context of an institutional theatre. It is a general working method that has been developed, formulated, and spread through BETTY DEVELOPS. At workshops, all scenic functions collaborate, and ideas are tested one-to-

one. Production formats from independent theatre groups and performance collectives, such as extended rehearsals, collaborative methods of working, and more fluid lines between scenic functions, are brought into and fused with the tight production deadlines and more hierarchal structure from the institutional theatre. This hybrid of production and organisation formats has resulted in a production format that very few institutional theatres have experience with, in a Danish context. The organisational and managerial structures merge into a unique production format and an ethic of care. The extra funding for extended rehearsals is central because it provides the extra time necessary for collaborative performance-making, in recognition of the fact that continuing collaboration processes that allows many voices to be heard are time-consuming. Collaborative performance-making is slow work. As such, the hybrid production format is a reaction to demands for hyper productivity at an institutional theatre. We perform a resistance to neoliberal performance culture and the neoliberal production of subjectivity characterised by an emphasis on driving up productivity and competition (Foucault 2000). The neoliberal performance culture also places a heavy weight on individualised responsibility and contributes to the withdrawal of the welfare state (Clarke and others 2007; Lazzarato 2009). To get a job, you need to be an entrepreneur of the self, to self-fashion, to become a certain kind of person, which makes it an ethical matter (Foucault 2000). The collaborative practice is a reaction to the neoliberalist production of subjectivity as self-fashioning or, as Haraway would call it, *self-making*: fixation on individual responsibility and a high level of productivity to please the market. The collaborative practice favours a production of subjectivity as *making-with* (Haraway 2016), a composite subjectivity with attention to how we become through our relations with others. The French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy underlines how community is essential by referring to being as always 'being-with', for we are inextricably connected to the community since our being is not meaningful unless it arises as shared between other bodies (Nancy 1991).

Workshop design

What infrastructural framework sparks creativity and collaborative co-creation? My thesis is that, if you use the same production format and design, you will produce the same interpersonal relations and the same creative result every time. Therefore, we redesign the process each time to meet the needs of each performance and create the best infrastructure for collaboration. Each process is different, but what we learned from conducting the first workshops, which holds true across all our processes, is the importance of preparing a clear workshop design. When multiple disciplines and scenic functions collaborate before the concept is decided and the material is totally open, it is vital to create a clear framework, focus points, and research questions that everyone can contribute to through investigating. However, will this not kill all creativity? On the contrary, the clearer the framework is, the more creative and experimental everyone becomes. We quickly learned that it is not enough even with a room full of skilled and creative people and the financial means. You need a clearly formulated framework that everyone can speak to from their specific discipline, otherwise everyone shoots in different directions at the same time and creativity dies. This was an important lesson. Therefore, we make an overall workshop design for all workshop-rehearsals on a production as well as individual workshop designs for each workshop. Each workshop has a focus area and several specific investigative questions. The director is responsible for formulating these with the help of the rest of the conceptualising group. I have acted as a

process consultant and as the binder between the conceptualising group, actors, and dancers as well as permanent staff: I have started by having conversations with the conceptualising group because everything springs from their artistic ideas. What do they wish to investigate or test? Then, we discussed what kind of design can best support these ideas. For *Animal Farm*, the conceptualising group wanted to experiment with mud as a central element of the scenography since mud has connotations to a farm but can also be used in an abstract manner. They also wished to test the music/soundscape and the text. Therefore, it felt natural to design three one-week workshops with these focus areas. For workshop #1, the headline was scenography, and the main research question was: Can mud function as the overall scenography element? We knew right away that all scenic functions had to contribute to this investigation and that it was important to test the mud with the actors in the first workshop before the deadlines for scenography and costumes. Together with all relevant functions from our production department I helped qualify ideas and bring in test costumes, props, etc. In this sense, we contributed with the tools, consultation and structure needed to give the creative investigations direction and focus.

Before each workshop, I have asked the conceptualising groups for a list of the props and costumes they want to work with. By now, I learned that, if this list is too long, the investigation is probably not specific enough. I then have returned to the groups and asked questions to focus the experiments. I have made sure that everyone was in the room, including all the actors, and that everyone knew what they were testing and had what they needed to test it. I documented the workshops by writing down everything and filming improvisations. I also took on small stage manager tasks. For bigger stage manager tasks, I have brought in the experienced stage manager and the production manager. On the last workshop day, I have usually facilitated an evaluation or a small showcase of the material produced. After each workshop, the conceptualising group meets to discuss, sort material, and make decisions on how to move forward. The breaks between workshops are an opportunity to let the material sink in and ferment. My role after the workshop has been to reflect with the conceptualising group and help prepare and design the next workshop. Here, I have asked questions such as: What were the central findings of the workshop? Is the focus area for the next workshop still relevant or do we need to change direction? What worked well and not so well? Were there any surprises? I have shared with the group what I experienced during the workshop and weighed in on creative choices, e.g. after the first *Animal Farm* workshop, I spoke for using mud as a central element since the actors expressed how they liked the materiality. After the first workshop, where we used real mud, we learned that this had to be replaced by another product. Our stage manager worked on this, and for the next workshop (besides from testing music/sound which was the focus area), we also tested the new product. In some processes, as a consultant, I weighed in more heavily in the workshop design and focus areas and/or in the creative choices (when I sensed it was needed) than others (when I sensed it was not needed).

Image description: A flow diagram showing the workshop design for *Animal Farm*. This presents the process of preparation from the start-up meeting to the start of rehearsals. A text explains that such workshop designs are tailor-made for each production. Click on <https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/1695946/1695947#tool-3001500> to see the

diagram.

Community of individual professionalisms and scenic functions

In workshop-rehearsals the collaborative exchange of subject knowledge between the individual scenic functions and departments contributes to creating, testing, and qualifying ideas. We have a builder and a stage manager with thirty years of experience. The combination of extra time and exchange between functions makes it possible to test wild ideas and different materials. For *Animal Farm*, the experienced director Elisa Kragerup and scenographer Ida Grarup learned from the stage manager when developing the scenography of mud. After the first year we did evaluation sessions with a handful of our closest freelance collaborations, to learn from their experience with the hybrid production format and improve our workshop designs. In one such evaluation session on our workshop design Grarup reflects: 'It is a gift to have more time with the production team to discuss materials, possibilities, and resources. To combine my own research with practical tests is a huge thing. And to be a big team where everyone on the production is there from the beginning' (cited from an unpublished, transcribed interview). When the performing artists are included as creating artists from the beginning of the conceptualising process, the binary opposition between creating and performing artists dissolves. An important intention with this is to include and value the permanent staff and freelancers, as well as the different departments and scenic functions, more equally by including everyone early in the process. When the performing artists and the production team are a part of the idea and concept development, you loosen up the binaries of the traditional hierarchical institutional theatre between director and actor, performing and creating artists, artists and technicians, freelancers and permanent staff. This challenges the production format where the director as the artistic genius sits on top of the pyramid. The separation between the artistic genius and the surroundings is shaken.

After the first months and workshop-rehearsals at the theatre I concluded that the collaborative practice is informed by what the French philosopher Jacques Rancière calls an *aesthetic community*, which refers not to a *community of aesthetes* but a *community of the senses*, a community of strong and different individuals collaborating where 'the intertwining of contradictory relations is intended to produce a new sense of community' (Rancière 2011: 58). An aesthetic community is not a collective unity where everyone is equal and similar but, on the contrary, a community that sees the individual differences as the main premise for the community, 'being together apart' (Rancière 2011: 51). It is not about creating a horizontal structure, but connections are made across strong individual professions, thus making the lines more fluid. There has been a shift from utopian ideals during the 1970s, with collaborative processes where everyone in the group was equal and homogenic through a horizontal structure, to processes in contemporary art that negotiate collaboration through the heterogeneity of the participants. Differences are emphasised above sameness in a politics of difference (Colin and Sachsenmaier 2016). With the collaborative practice the professionalism, identity, and subject knowledge of the individual are conserved, while simultaneously opening for cross-disciplinary development in cross-disciplinary constellations where musicians, scenographers, builders, and composers *make-with* each other and come up with new ideas and solutions. As such, the individual professions expand each other. The

bringing together of different professionalisms and strong individuals resonates with Nancy's notion of 'being-with'. It also resonates with the theories of Haraway through the intertwinement of binary distinctions in aesthetic productions: director/actor, employer/employee, genius/collective genius, investigation/final product, and individual/community.

The director as facilitator

Our experience is that the collaborative practice requires facilitation. The 1970s ideas of consensual decision-making and supposed leaderlessness are abandoned in favour of the director as facilitator rather than author. We operate with collective authorship but not collective decision-making. As Colin and Sachsenmaier (2016: 8) note, when it comes to collaborative processes with *shared invention* and 'a significant input from the performers to the creation of performance material', it is important to clarify who has the compositional decision-making voice and access to the higher organising plane. It is typically the director who takes the lead in creating a framework and facilitating the process, and who sorts and composes the material generated by the collective body. The facilitator has eyes to see the whole picture and the different layers and aesthetic components: which part of the story will music, scenography, text, and physicality tell, respectively? The closer the premiere comes, the more the facilitator steps into character and makes the necessary decisions. As such, we operate with a hierarchy; however, the conceptualising group plays an active role in the compositional decision-making, the performers are collaborative co-creators, and there is a large degree of movement between the scenic functions.

The idea for co-facilitation grew from the development of our workshop-rehearsals since it made sense, for example, for the scenographer to co-facilitate when the focus area is scenography. On *Animal Farm*, Kragerup worked closely with the conceptualising group and Grarup facilitated one workshop and Silkeberg another. On *Dark Spring*, director Ginman was joined by co-director and choreographer Kloborg. Workshop-rehearsals provide time for an ongoing conversation where the director is not afraid to step aside. Many voices are heard, make suggestions, and disagree, which creates a decentralisation of the space carried by shared artistic leadership and responsibility.

Staying with the trouble of cross-disciplinary making-with

The cross-disciplinary is an exercise in letting different voices and art forms, such as music, dance, and theatre, tell the story together more equally. A recurring question is: Which layer of the story is the music, the dramatic text, the dance, and so forth representing? What can be performed in music and dance instead of words? This is also about shaking the hierarchy with the text at the top of the pyramid dominant throughout Western theatre history. I heard many of the artists talk about the possibilities the hybrid production format has to offer and about falling in love with each other's different skillsets during the collaborative, cross-disciplinary creation process. Starting early on together, the conceptualising group, the actors, and the production team expands the individual professionalism and takes it places no one could have dreamt up alone: 'My brain is not as good as a collective brain. You get a different result when you can test and have practical experience with elements of the scenography together with the actors who will inhabit it' (says scenographer Karin Gille in a workshop evaluation session).

From my experience, the collaborative practice provides the different disciplines and scenic functions with possibilities in terms of co-determination and co-creation. However, shaking longstanding hierarchies also invites trouble. I know from my work as coordinator, that simply to get everyone, including busy freelance artists and the permanent staff, into a room together for workshop-rehearsals is logistically difficult. Our performances are cross-disciplinary, and the performance-making processes are collaborative in all phases; however, there are still situations where values, norms, and traditions get in the way of a good work environment, and of collaboration between the permanent staff (who has inhabited the theatre for many years in a more conventional model) and freelance artists (who wish to work more exploratively with the collaborative practice). With a conventional patriarchal organisation model, there is a set top-down hierarchy and set distribution of roles. The upside to this is that everyone knows their role and place in the hierarchy and is told exactly what to do and when. Many decisions have been made beforehand, which creates a sense of comfort, safety, and stability. When this model is shaken, it creates trouble in navigation for everyone. As I mentioned earlier, one of my contributions to this dilemma was to present Haraway's request to *stay with the trouble*. In our collaborative processes, many answers are not given beforehand, but they must be found in cross-disciplinary collaboration. Radical collaborative performance-making highlights the nature of interdependency. The individual disciplines are constantly affected by, and highly intertwined with, the other disciplines. Oftentimes this means waiting for the other disciplines to finish something or make decisions before you can continue your own work. Some find great pleasure in co-determination, sharing unfinished 'bad' sketches, a fluid role, and inhabiting the unknown, but others find this less appealing, which means that a thorough matching of expectations is central when people are asked to go outside their traditional roles.

Desidentification: Working *on and against* the artistic genius

Breaking away from the director as the artistic genius (who in isolation thinks out all the material beforehand and composes a specific arrangement for the actors), material is developed collaboratively. During the collaborative material-development process, a common language, aesthetic, and physicality for the performance are developed. On the first workshop-rehearsal day of *Animal Farm*, the director openly stated that no one holds all the answers, and that collaborative performance-making is valued by sharing sketches and failures.

In my discussions with the permanent staff, the relationship to the notion of artistic genius has been a recurring subject since it is marked by the ambivalence of both love and resistance. This led me to introduce the theories of Jose Esteban Muñoz. The notions of the artistic genius are not erased but rather renegotiated through Muñoz's concept of disidentification. Muñoz's terminology is developed in relation to queer individuals and minority groups as they relate to the dominant culture. I use the term 'disidentification' in the context of the Betty Nansen Theatre since it offers a mode of resistance to the dominant culture, useful when working to change structures from within a culture/organisation. Disidentification refers to a third mode of subject construction in relation to the dominant culture. The first mode of subject construction identifies with discursive and ideological norms. The second mode counter-identifies with, and rebels against, the dominant ideology (Muñoz 1999). Muñoz presents

disidentification as a third mode is disidentification, a strategy:

that neither opts to assimilate within such a structure nor strictly opposes it; rather, disidentification is a strategy that works on and against dominant ideology. Instead of buckling under the pressures of dominant ideology (identification, assimilation) or attempting to break free of its inescapable sphere (counteridentification, utopianism), this 'working on and against' is a strategy that tries to transform a cultural logic from within. (Muñoz 1999:11)

Following Muñoz, the artistic genius and the star (the dominant culture/ideology) are renegotiated in a simultaneous refusal and embrace/acceptance of the genius: room is made for the multiplicity of voices, shared invention, and the collaborative creation process, but at the same time the collaborative practice depends on a director/facilitator/genius who can create confidence and trust in the room. In other words, it is not an either/or genius binary thinking but a both—and approach. This *both—and* or *on-and-against* terminology found its way into the vocabulary of the collaborative practice.

PART TWO

***Animal Farm*: Improvisation and shared invention**

There is no pressure on us to reach a certain goal, the premiere is nowhere in sight. We have the time to test all sorts of things and there is no wrong way to do it. It is an open workspace, and you cannot be 'bad'. (Actor Siff Vintersol in an interview for the *Animal Farm*-video from workshop#1, Tranholm and others 2022.)

The hybrid production format with stretched-out rehearsals via workshops provides extra time, but how is the extra time used to develop the collaborative practice? The time is used to develop material collectively. Across all fourteen performances that have been a part of BETTY DEVELOPS, material is developed in collective research sessions, collaborative idea and concept development, tests, and through improvisation. All material from mood boards, improvisations, text, sketches, and scenography is shared in a common material bank. During workshop-rehearsals, I experienced how a common language for the performance takes shape from the ongoing conversations and experimentation. Everyone speaks as individuals but contributes to the common material bank.

For *Animal Farm* it was important to test (and improvise with) the use of mud with the actors who would have to inhabit the mud night after night. When the director brings finished arrangements for every scene the process is faster than with improvisation. With improvisation the answers are not given beforehand, and many suggestions are made for each scene, from which the director can choose. This takes more time and specific improvisation tasks. The hybrid production format including workshop-rehearsals made testing as well as extensive improvisation possible. In the first *Animal Farm* workshop, the group worked with mud as the given circumstance and as a starting point for improvisations. The group explored improvisation tasks such as: How do you assert yourself in a position of power when you are covered in mud? How can we play with hierarchies, group dynamics, and power relations with

mud and suits as tools? The director Kragerup delegated improvisation tasks to the actors, including genre, universe, or character improvisations with or without text. She gave a common task that the actors improvised with, such as the mud improvisations. Or she divided them into three groups of two actors and asked them to come up with a suggestion for a scene with short preparation time. Three suggestions for a scene were then generated that she could sort and further develop. The ideas of the actors are carried out promptly and physically on stage, as opposed to the director thinking out the scene in solitude, as Kragerup explains: 'I have great confidence in the actors, they are incredibly creative and make up all sorts of scenarios that I would never come up with on my own' (director Elisa Kragerup in research interview).

The actors direct each other and gain ownership of the material, and all actors contribute to the development of all characters. During *Animal Farm* workshops, Kragerup gave the actors the improvisation task of transformation from animal to human by performing animals trying to learn something human. Kragerup also gave the actors home assignments. It could be to prepare a certain situation or present a certain character with help from the other actors. The actors come prepared with an idea that they then direct, and stage the situation using the other actors. 'I do not order a feeling but play with the non-psychological. For example, that you are furious and horny simultaneously, without coverage, it frees up something in the body. Improvisations on sensuous, brutal, abrupt, or extremely slow transformations release something' (director Elisa Kragerup in research interview).

Kragerup's improvisations often heighten the circumstances, such as extensive use of mud, as a way of encouraging the actors to set themselves free and go for an expressive, yet credible, physical acting style. To bring out the most expressive take on a scene, Kragerup also does what she calls 'accumulation improvisations' where she invites the performers to improvise and just keep increasing the intensity and amount of material until they cannot come up with anything else. She also gives one last task to the performers when they are tired because something very interesting almost always happens at this point. Improvisation takes a toll on the actors because it requires a lot more of them than just taking directions; however, it is a useful tool to generate material collaboratively because the director invites the actors to be shared inventors. The improvisation tasks are given so that the actors are the first ones to come up with suggestions. This relies on the shape and composition part of the actor's imagination, and on the director discovering possibilities in the material that she would not have come up with alone. It is about the unknown, the undiscovered, and about recognising something together. When the performers watch each other's material and prepare scenic situations together, when they both direct and are the directed, then an inside/outside experience occurs. 'It is fun being let onto the playground of the director, scenographer, dramatic writer, and musician and see what they are working on and work with them in a space that I am usually excluded from' (actor Maria Winther Nørgaard in an interview for the *Animal Farm*-video from workshop#1, Tranholm and others 2022). The workshop improvisations seem to be an ice breaker; at first there is some awkwardness in the room but when everyone shares sketches the room loosens up quickly. The mud improvisations contributed to this. When everyone is covered in mud, laughter and playfulness spread and individual performances and egos are more easily put aside. Though Kragerup steps more

and more into character as facilitator and decision-making voice as the premiere approaches, she continues with the improvisation tasks until the premiere. As such, the performance-making can be characterised as one long durational improvisation. The *Animal Farm* performance ended up with a stage filled with mud everywhere; this took a huge collaborative effort and every scenic function helped make it happen. My thesis is that this would not have been possible were it not for the extra time given to test and experiment.

There is also another methodological aspect that contributes to the collaborative generation of material: when looking at the choice of text material for the fourteen productions, the majority is based on a novel and not a (classical) dramatic text, as was the case for *Animal Farm* and *Dark Spring*. More than a means to sell tickets, this seems to be a methodological principle to create a space for collaborative co-creation between the different disciplines. With a dramatic text there tends to be a drive towards solving the text or to translating the thoughts of another person (the playwright) to the stage, whereas with *Animal Farm*, Orwell was simply the undercurrent for a discussion. The text was the result of the ongoing conversation between the participants involved – the conversations create the performance. In and between the workshops, the conceptualising team pulls out different things from the novel, has a collective discussion, says ‘let us have nine women on stage’, brings in theory, shares YouTube videos, discusses the themes they are most concerned with, and a new language starts to take shape that is apart from the novel. Based on the collaborative research, conversations, and discussions, Silkeberg wrote the first scene for *Animal Farm*, Grarup came with three suggestions for the room, and Kragerup formulated improvisation tasks. In the final script, none of Orwell’s words were left and the performance was far from a Stalinist critique but rather a performance that explored group dynamics and the threat of totalitarianism in a contemporary context. The performance speaks the common language of the group, not that of an individual dramatic writer or artistic genius. This is a collaborative space that you are rarely afforded at an institutional theatre.

The group is the star: late distribution of roles

‘We did not decide anything about casting; who plays who and the concept of the narrator is also still open’ (director Elisa Kragerup at the first workshop for *Animal Farm*).

With the collaborative practice, the focus is not on one main character. The clearest manifestation of this is that most processes begin without the roles being distributed, as was the case for *Animal Farm*. The actors agreed to be in the performance and signed their contract without knowing which role they’ll play and whether it is a small or large role. This makes the casting process even more important; a BETTY DEVELOPS cast comprises a mix of young actors and older actors, from acting students to famous star actors, and always some actors who have worked with the collaborative practice before. The most important thing when casting is that actors enjoy working collaboratively.

As a result of the workshop-rehearsals new relational patterns arise. A key to facilitating a room where it feels natural and free to distribute roles late is bringing the actors onboard early. Another key is communicating that everyone is fumbling and sharing sketches, including the director. And that it provides the opportunity for your voice to be taken seriously in other parts

of the performance-making than our own role or scenic function. Even then, the late distribution of roles is demanding for the actors who sometimes fall in love with a character that they do not get to play. This creates a tension between the individual actor and the group, and therefore requires a thorough matching of expectations, that the actors trust the outside eye of the director, and that they can set aside their ego and make themselves available to the material. 'On the one hand it is anxiety and competition ridden, but on the other hand it is very liberating and gives you a large degree of co-determination and contributory influence. It helps that the director emphasises that we are doing an ensemble performance' (actor Ena Spottag in an evaluation session on *Animal Farm*). Sometimes roles are not distributed until the ordinary rehearsal start. Until then, all the actors contribute to developing all the characters. It enables the actors to see themselves as a part of a larger whole when they do not only focus on the character they are performing. Instead, they also look at something outside themselves and create a new language together. The actors are highly co-creative, and more ideas are generated for the portrayal of each character. They have stood in the shoes of all the characters and gained a deeper understanding of them all, and can thus contribute to the wholeness of the performance better.

In the performances of Kragerup there is usually a common body and collective character representation. In *Animal Farm*, the nine women of different ages ended up performing the nine different characters, but a collective narrator is performed—they share the role of the narrator. During workshops, they also developed a common body and worked on what defined the characters as a group.

Constitutive ambiguity

'It is fun to get to test your ideas and to think for yourself. But at the same time, it is nerve-wracking because I sometimes have no idea what I am doing, which is vulnerable. Vulnerable is the right word. Because you jump into something you have no idea where it will land. But at the same time that's what's fun'. (actor Maria Winther Nørgaard in an interview for *Animal Farm*-video from workshop#1, Tranholm and others 2022)

Nørgaard points to the built-in ambiguities in the *making-with* of the collaborative practice and shaking up hierarchies: vulnerability and courage, holding on and letting go, planning and the unplanned, troubles and ease. With improvisation and collaborative material accumulation, the artists are working in the interval between the intuitive and the prepared. The director prepares and establishes a framework in which the intuitive can unfold. For the director, it is about finding a balance between giving up power, while maintaining some control: 'You must leave a lot up to the collective and expose yourself, but without losing the grip. Sometimes it can be unpleasant and fragile. You must learn to be in that room' (director Elisa Kragerup in research interview). The same goes for the actors and everyone else in the room. The collaborative practice requires a mutual confidence and trust between the participants. The vulnerability underlines the need to facilitate and create a safe space for everyone to be courageous in. It is the responsibility of the director and the theatre management to create an environment of care. Inviting everyone to dance with you very early on has many advantages, but what can be challenging is that the further the group gets into ordinary rehearsals, the closer the premiere comes, the more the director steps into character, makes choices and decisions. Sometimes it

is tough if your idea gets cut. This is a part of working both *on and against* the artistic genius and why it is central to match expectations from the beginning.

All the performers come with suggestions for all the characters during improvisations, which fuels a lot of ideas. However, it sometimes creates the dilemma: 'When to let go of the dramaturgy, the performance, the co-creation and enter my core work as an actor?' (actor Mathilde Arcel Fock in Flensted-Jensen et al. 2023). Susan Melrose refers to this dilemma as 'constitutive ambiguity' — a tension between the shared and the singular (Melrose 2006, quoted in Colin and Sachsenmaier 2016:10). The constitutive ambiguity is also reflected in Kragerup's thoughts on finding the balance between collective authorship and the singular decision-making of the facilitator, and in the singularity of the played roles of the performers versus the collective material accumulation. In an evaluation session on our workshop design scenographer Ida Grarup, who co-facilitated the mud-workshop, points out about the process of shared invention: 'With the collaborative approach it is important to match expectations, so you know when to prepare, bring something to the table, are active, or when you should observe in a more passive role or give feedback.' As such, there is a constant negotiation between the shared and the singular.

***Dark Spring*: Directing duo and a common physicality**

The collaborative practice is fluid and in constant process; therefore, each process is designed differently to meet the needs of the artistic vision, and each process is constantly renegotiated along the way. For *Dark Spring*, the ambition of the conceptualising group was to create a common physicality between the two actors and the two dancers. This ambition informed which type of workshop design was needed. From this wish I could help design the workshop-rehearsals. We choose to do one two-week workshop with physicality as the overall focus area, and two three-day workshops with text and character as the overall focus areas. One of the central research questions for the first workshop was: Can we create a common physicality and make dance and acting/text tell the story more equally? This made it crucial for the actors and dancers to have as much time together as possible to get to know each other. Therefore, the first two-week workshop was used to experiment with this, and the choreographer Kloborg and the director Ginman co-facilitated the workshop. The investigation was about dissolving the sharp binary distinction between dancers and actors and seeing them all as performers doing the same physical work. By including the dancers and the performers in all parts of the production, including the collaborative research, the development of the text, and the physicality, a synergy was built between them. This created a backdrop to experiment and improvise with what was possible to create with these particular performers. Ginman and Kloborg asked: How can we open the material? What physicality can we create together? How can we create the scenes in the cross-disciplinary field between acting, dance, music, and light? How can the visual universe of the performance be developed with simple props, objects, and light design? In an interview I did with Ginman about her practice Ginman explains:

'I use a combination of classic Stanislavski techniques, situation-based and clear frames for the actors to act in, the method of physical actions. But simultaneously I catalyse the bodies of the actors into a non-psychological language, a room with a slip, a wildness and

immediacy. For this, I use devising. Devising creates the framework for us to be surprised, to get suggestions from the performers, and provides a way into the material. At the *Dark Spring* workshops, we used physical response by working with responses to images, mental states, ways to use objects, and the work of other female surrealists. It is not about copying but about responding’.

In *Dark Spring*, the main character is a young girl. She was performed as both third- and first-person narrator. The group developed a common physical language while at the same time working on the psychology of each individual character. The girl has her own fantasy world and in one scene she is attacked by an octopus monster and saved by Captain Nemo, the fictional iconic character from Jules Verne’s sci-fi classic *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* (1870). The performers were given the task of finding images of monsters. They used these images in a physical response exercise combined with a Stanislavski situation-based approach where the situation is the monster attacking the girl. In my interview with her Ginman puts it this way: ‘The characters can break the illusion, the fourth wall, but the actors do not let go of the characters, they are simply aware of the theatre space. They must master both the physical, the Brechtian, and the psychological. Not all actors can do this.’ A common physical language is created through a physical community or language created in close collaboration between actors, dancers, director, and choreographer. Simultaneously, the individual characters are clearly depicted in ways that allow the audience to connect and feel with them. The binary opposition between the individual and the community is blurred and renegotiated in the process.

When it comes to collaboration and role of the director as facilitator, Ginman says:

‘There is a difference between leading and claiming I have all the answers. The material is in constant movement, and I constantly renegotiate the process, which takes careful process planning and clarity. The facilitation of a clear framework to play within. It takes people I trust and that we agree on the overall universe. You must work on a more non-hierarchical structure. If you just say non-hierarchical structure, the conventions of society come into play such as gender, introvert/extrovert, experience and age’.

I argue that BETTY DEVELOPS gave Ginman the opportunity, framework and tools to work in a more non-hierarchical manner through workshop-rehearsals and time for collaborative reflection. Ginman and Kloborg found such a great rhythm co-facilitating during workshops for *Dark Spring* that they ended up co-directing the performance and co-directing another BETTY DEVELOPS production: *Alice* (2023). This is a very tangible example of collective genius or democratisation of the singular artistic genius catalysed by the BETTY DEVELOPS experiment. The workshop-rehearsals gave the young artists Ginman and Kloborg the right framework to discover that it is possible to work differently and spread the notion of the genius to more bodies and that it is a gift to share responsibility.

Collaboration as research

We implemented the hybrid production format with workshops little by little, and the permanent staff contributed more and more actively to the process until it was imbedded in the institution.

Now, after five years, I argue that the methods, and the hybrid production format, we have developed through the artistic research project BETTY DEVELOPS — with extended rehearsal periods, tailor-made workshops, a vocabulary for non-hierarchical working practices — effects thinking and ways of collaborating. As concrete examples of this, we now share our findings and have a common language. I formulated the key features, methods and values of the collaborative practice in the Three Cs manifesto: co-creative — corporal — caring. We also implemented process meetings every two weeks with the management duo, dramaturg, event planner, project manager, production manager and me. In the process meetings, we talk through all the productions, practically and artistically, and we share knowledge about all productions to keep them on track. Is there something we can do to help — sharpen the thematic focus, bring in extra help, etc.? As a result of the work of BETTY DEVELOPS the production department implemented meta meetings during ordinary rehearsals where they discuss the collaborative aspects of the production. We do evaluations/reflections in workshops to talk through the central findings of the workshop and discuss the challenges. I argue that these meetings and reflection sessions are something that has grown naturally out of the collaborative research, raised awareness, and shared the sense of responsibility. Consequently, the artistic genius is spread to other bodies as is the notion of the researcher or academic scholar as the isolated/outside genius and a configuration of collaboration as research emerges.

Communication is central to collaboration. To spread the collaborative practice to the entire infrastructure of the theatre having a common language for the practice makes the implementation easier. In my role as project manager for BETTY DEVELOPS, I discovered early on that it was crucial to contribute to the development of a common language. I went about the task by documenting, listening, asking questions and having conversations with members of the permanent staff and freelancers. After a while, patterns emerged, and I was able to bring theoretical perspectives into the conversations, such as Rancière and Haraway.

My presence and an artistic research approach is a part of developing the collaborative artistic practice. Making art is also developing methods, organising thoughts, and feeding the room with methodical tools, structure, knowledge, theory and language — this holds agency. Over five years, we verbalised, qualified, and refined the collaborative practice. A silent and intuitive knowledge was verbalised collaboratively. One example of this verbalisation is the guide 'Eight Paths to Collaborative Co-Creation'. It is essential for us to communicate and share our artistic research with our surroundings. Therefore, I added a blog to our [webpage](#) for long reads. Here, I have written about the stretched-out rehearsals and central findings from the workshop-rehearsals. My focus in these writings have been work methods, i.e. recurring methods from the rehearsal room, such as improvisation, reading and reflection sessions, as well as collaborative research. For *Dark Spring*, I wrote two long reads: 'Collaborative Sound and Light on *Dark Spring*' (Tranholm 2023) and 'Collaborative Research on *Dark Spring*' (Tranholm 2023). For *Animal Farm*, I collaborated with a professional photographer/filmmaker on making two videos about the first workshop (Tranholm and others 2022) — excerpts from these videos are featured in this exposition. I have also written about our methods from the organisational space in long reads such as 'The Collaborative Practice: Organisation and Management' (Tranholm 2021) and 'The Collaborative Practice: Process' (Tranholm 2021).

Collective genius and star figure

Audiences stand in line to see the performance collective *Sort Samvittighed* that plays for sold-out houses. The group by name alone can pack the theatre, which begs the question whether the theatre is still driven by a capitalist commercial carriage. One can argue this is so if one sticks to the old binary opposition between large ticket sales/commercial interests and artistic integrity. I argue that new hybrid constellations are enacted where the two do not exclude each other. The collaborative practice is activist in the sense that it is tested, structured, and spread in an institutional frame where the theatre institution is renegotiated as a collaborative setting for facilitating and producing innovative performing art. From what I have experienced, the star and genius figures have not vanished but are renegotiated in such a configuration that they are spread out to several bodies in a collective star and genius, or a democratisation of the genius or star. We are working *on and against* the notion of artistic genius and the star, and the institutional theatre, transforming the institution from within. From my perspective, it is the artistic research, the framework, the infrastructure, the hybrid production format, and the co-facilitation that seem to dissolve hard-held positions between disciplines and shake fixed categories, the binary separation between creating and performing artists, and the consequential power structures. Owing to the extra time given where everyone meets sometimes years in advance, the group dynamic is affected, and everyone depends more deeply on each other, more voices are heard, and trust is built, which creates more courage to test wild ideas otherwise left behind on productions at traditional institutional theatres. Seeds are planted for the institution to accommodate other ways of producing theatre. However, the *making-with* is not without troubles in navigation and there are shortcomings: the collaborative practice has built-in ambiguities and, while it includes many voices usually excluded, it can also exclude those who are not comfortable improvising and being in the unknown.

As a result of the years of government cutbacks, private funding is even more important. The resources from the Bikuben Foundation are put into extra time, making a longer process possible, which is an implicit critique of neoliberalist demands for effectivity. The collaborative practice in an institutional frame offers itself as a figure of resistance to the neoliberal individualised performance culture since it breaks away from neoliberal demands for high productivity and individual responsibility, and moves towards an ethic of common responsibility, caring, and listening. The collaborative practice nurtures a cultural production of subjectivity as *making-with* and being-with each other in a shared practice.

I have produced and shared knowledge and central findings of the collaborative practice on the theatre homepage, through our symposium, through newsletters, and on social media, cultural platforms and in journals. However, looking at the bigger picture, resistance does not go far beyond the institution and the Danish performing arts scene. The Betty Nansen Theatre is to some extent an island and, while the collaborative practice is making its way into the infrastructure of the theatre, it is difficult to get the collaborative message through to the broader public. In the reception of the practice, a few critics noticed the BETTY DEVELOPS artistic research project and see the collaborative effort reflected in the performances; however, in the reception, focus is still largely on the director or the few famous actors. Thus, the communication of the collaborative practice is an ongoing task for us. To document,

reflect, and produce knowledge from the inside of the institutional theatre and share this knowledge with the public potentially has ideological, political, and ethical implications in the sense that it can contribute to making visible the labour of the many. It also has the potential to rethink the institutional theatre as a site of knowledge production with artistic research as an institutional function. This knowledge feeds into the artistic space as well as in the dissemination of the practice. If the collaborative practice and approach are to have a voice and an impact both culturally and politically, then they need a language that can express the collaborative message and its importance in a crisis ridden world. Such a language may be forming at the Betty Nansen Theatre. Here, reflection, dissemination, and awareness of one's own practice creates a language and community of practice internally, while simultaneously forming an external voice.

Image description: The exposition ends with a list of what the author terms the 3 Cs: CO-CREATION - CORPORAL – CARING

CO-CREATION

We believe in collaborative co-creation as the path to more diverse and sustainable lives and institutions. Our method therefore cultivates collaboration organisationally, procedurally and artistically. We believe that we become braver together. We think collaboratively, from our shared leadership with two equal directors, through extended rehearsal processes with time for collaborative co-creation, to cross-aesthetic performances where the group is the star.

In our repertoire, this is manifested in the curation of works that explore collaboration in encounters between, for example, classical ballet, street dance, and drama. It is also explored in works with collective character representation, where multiple actors come together to portray a single character across, for example, gender and age in new constellations that challenge both gender norms and the fixation on stars and individuality.

CORPORAL

We are interested in performing arts that acknowledge and cultivate the fact that we become who we are together with other bodies in living communities. The encounter with the physical body is the hallmark of the performing arts. We nurture this by creating performances that often place the body at the centre, for example by equating dance and drama, or with the genre of dance narratives, where stories are told through the body rather than words.

Improvisation is a cornerstone of the method because improvisation has the ability to activate the body first, and then engage the brain. This often results in wild artistic ideas that we cannot think our way to. For the method, bodily sensation is a prerequisite for the reflection, knowledge, and artistic research we pursue. We sense, therefore we are. The method celebrates and gives voice to our physically embedded knowledge.

CARING

Feminism opens up diversity, equality, and care. For us, feminism is care activism. We promote this by caring for the community, the individual, and the performances we create together. In practice, this means that we establish clear frameworks for community well-

being and create healthy and safe working conditions for all employees. We have rethought our production format so that we have more time and space to focus on environmental and human sustainability.

In our performances, care activism is expressed by turning the spotlight towards other worlds and bodies, the overlooked and the unknown, to open up a wealth of new voices, interpretive possibilities, and perspectives for the audience.

Click on <https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/1695946/1695947#tool-3002528> to see these paragraphs in context.

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